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Three Poems · *James Laughlin*

SOME MEMORIES OF E.P. (DRAFTS & FRAGMENTS)

Rapallo (1934)

So I came to Rapallo, I was eighteen then
and you accepted me into your Ezuversity
where there was no tuition, the best beanery since Bologna.
Literachoor, you said, is news that stays news
and quoting from some bloke named Rodolphus Agricola,
“ut doceat ut moveat ut delectet.”
You taught me and you moved me and you gave me great delight.
Your conversation was the best show in town,
whatever you'd ever heard or read as fresh as when it first got in
your head.
The books you loaned me were filled with caustic marginalia.
To keep from losing them you hung your glasses and your pens and
scissors from strings over your desk.
You read my poems and crossed out half the words, saying I didn't
need them.
You told me not to bother writing stories because Flaubert
and Stendhal and James and Joyce had done all that could be done
with fiction.
They say you were cranky, maybe so, but only with people who
deserved it,
stupid professors busy killing poetry and international bankers
making usury and *i mercanti di cannoni* selling arms to both sides
of a war.
You elucidated the Mysteries, all about *dromena* and *epopte*, and how
it was *epopte* that sent the sperm up into a man's brain to make
him smart.
You loved cats and the cats loved you.
Some days we would walk up the stoney salite on the mountainside
behind town
through the olive groves and the little peasant farms where the cats
were perched on the stone walls.

They were waiting for you, they knew you would bring them a
 packet of scraps from the lunch table.
 You would call to the cats, "Micci, micci, micci, vieni qua, c'è da
 mangiare."
 And one day when we were feeding the cats near San Pantaleone we
 discussed what you would do with your Nobel Prize money when
 you finally got it
 and you thought that a chef would be the best thing since you were
 tired of the food at the Albuggero Rapallo.
 And when Henghes the sculptor (id est Heinz Winterfeld Klusmann)
 walked all the way down from Hamburg to see you
 because he had heard you had known Gaugier, and he arrived half-
 starved,
 you fed him and let him sleep in the big dog kennel on the terrace
 (since there were no extra beds in the penthouse apartment)
 and you took him to the yard of the man who made gravestones and
 got him credit for a block of marble
 from which he carved his sitting-down centaur, and you sold it for
 him to Signora Agnelli, the Fiat lady, in Torino.
 And that was the beginning of Henghes' good fortune and fame
 (and the drawing for the centaur became the colophon for New
 Directions).
 You said I was such a terrible poet I had better become a publisher,
 a profession you inferred which required no talent and only limited
 intelligence.
 And after lunch you would stretch out on your bed with your
 cowboy hat shielding the sea light from the window
 with the big Chinese dictionary on a pillow on your stomach
 and you stared at the characters, searching for the glyph of meaning
 in the calligraphy.
 (And years later the professor asked your daughter to define your
 ideogrammic method
 and she thought for a moment and replied that you looked deep into
 the characters to find the truth,
 which was a properly Confucian answer.)
 And Kung said: "Anyone can run to excesses, it is easy to shoot past
 the mark, it is hard to stand fast in the middle."

And as “Deer Bull” (“Dear Old Hugger-scrunch”) loved to say in his
Paterson,
SO BE IT!

Austria (1936)

And one year we left the Sienese to stew in the Marshes
(since the price offered by Bartolomeo was not high enough to make
it worthwhile to slug them)
and we called on the Princess Maria at Gais to check on the progress
of her education
(and you remarked that Herr Marker was a man of sound principles
because he hung his pants on the crucifix).
Then up over the Brenner into the Tyrol, you and I and the Lady,
to call on Herr Unterguggenberger, the mayor of Woergel, to learn
the facts of how Vienna had clamped down on the circulation of
Schwungeld.
And in Salzburg we put up at the Goldener Adler, on the wrong side
of the river for economy, where there were bedbugs,
and you came close to blows with Professor X of Haavud
who was frantic to become president of that institution
but was hindered by a little problem of concubinage, which is *mal vu*
in the town where H. James is interred.
He resented your comments on the curriculum of the world’s greatest
university,
and you didn’t see eye to eye on literachoor.
You loved the Mozart and the Vivaldi at the festival
but when we went to the *Festspielhaus* to hear *Fidelio* (Toscanini
conducting)
you began to squirm in fifteen minutes and rose up from your seat to
sing out:
“Well, what can you expect, the man had syphilis?”
And all this was part of my instruction.